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ABSTRACT

Self-reports and observations of the naturally occurring behavior of adolescents were made to investigate friendship patterns. The study was conducted during a week-long summer camp for children of university alumni attending classes. A total of 20 female and 10 male youths, ranging in age from 12 to 18 years, participated. Self-report data concerning friends, friendship, and/or demographic characteristics were gathered via brief questionnaires at the beginning and end of the day camp experience. Observational data were gathered by two observers, who recorded the intragroup friendship interactions of the 10 subjects 14 to 15 years of age. Observations were made primarily during free time in a dormitory lounge supplied with recreational and cooking equipment. Confirming earlier findings, self-report data indicated that adolescents preferred as friends those of a similar age and sex. While friendships were generally mutual, nearly half of all friendships shifted, and discordant friendships became more prevalent. The number of friends increased greatly during the week. Observational data agreed with the self-report data: individuals interacted most frequently with those they nominated as their best friends. Boys were more likely than girls to distinguish best friends from other group members by interacting with same-sex peers at close range in a physical manner. (RH)

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Nominated and Observed Adolescent Friendship: A Comparison of Findings

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Adolescent friends share dreams and experiences, aspirations and disappointments, the important and the trivial. For many individuals relationships with peers become an important developmental need at pubescence (Brown, 1981; Savin-Williams, 1980; Savin-Williams and Montemayor, in preparation).

> At no other life stage are conditions so ripe for extensive, intensive friendship ties . . . . The confluence of societal norms, environmental conditions and lessened role obligations creates in adolescence an unprecendented and unequaled set of conditions in which friendships can flourish. Adolescence emerges as the primary life stage for investment in friendship (Brown, 1981; pp. 35-36).

Friendships are important in the establishment of identity (Erikson, 1959), sexual relationshps (Sullivan, 1953), and survival of the vicissitudes of adolescence (Douvan and Adelson, 1966).

One would thus expect a rather extensive research literature on adolescent friendships. Yet, in a recent review Hartup (in press) concludes that we know relatively little about the formation, maintenance, and characteristics of friendships during the adolescent years. In particular, there are few published studies which have observed in naturalistic settings the behavior of adolescents as they interact with friends and no published research that compares friendship behavior with friendship selection. The vast majority of the research has relied on the self-reports of youth concerning their friendship patterns. Within developmental psychology, however, human ethologists have recently questioned the usefulness of data collected by such methodological techniques (Savin-Williams, Small, and Zeldin, 1982). Our earlier research on self-esteem, altruism, and dominance among adolescents indicate that when the issue under investigation is one of psychological centrality to the individual, self-report data are suspect (Savin-Williams and Jaquish, 1981; Savin-Williams, Small, and Zeldin, 1982). Behavioral observations provide information not readily accessible through paper-and-pencil measures: ecological validity; assessment

of the immediate situation and its multi- determinants; and cross-age, cultural, and species comparisons.

The current study uses both self-reports and naturally occurring behavior of adolescents to address the following questions:

(1) Is friendship based on similarity of age, gender, and personality characteristics?

(2) What do adolescents look for in and enjoy doing with friends?

(3) Do friends select each other as best friends?

(4) Do friendship nominations remain stable during a one-week period?

(5) Are frequency, proximity, and type of social contact predictors of friendship nominations?

(6) Do the sexes differ in their friendship behavior?

Method

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted during a University sponsored summer camp for children of alumni. Parents attended classes for a week while their children attended recreational and educational programs. The adolescents lived in a separate dormitory during the evenings.

During the week of the current study 30 Caucasian youth (20 females and 10 males, ages 12 to 18 years) attended the day camp. Fifty-three precent of the youth have dual career parents; all are from upper middle or upper social status families; 63 percent are from Northeastern states; and an even number are from Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and "None" religious identities. Almost two-thirds of the sample had been to this camp during past summers and thus knew others in the group. From this sample, five boys and five

girls who were 14 or 15 years of age and who had been to this particular camp in previous years were selected for the observation part of the study.

Measures and Procedures

Questionnaires. Questionnaires were given to all youth during a Sunday evening orientation session, asking each to answer the following:

(1) Basic socio-demographic facts (name, sex, age, home state, religion, parents' occupation)

(2) Who do you know in the group and for how long?

(3) Who are your best friends in the group?

(4) What do you look for in a friend?

(5) What do you enjoy doing with your friends?

A second questionnaire was distributed to the adolescents on Friday, the last day of camp, asking them to list current best friends in the group.

Observations. Each day, Monday through Friday, two observers recorded the intra-group friendship interactions of the ten 14 to 15 year olds. One of the two observers (CK) was a counselor for the group, recording data all five days. The other observer was one of two individuals, a male (RSW) or a female (MM) who were considered by the adolescents to be camp staff.

Each observer randomly drew (with replacement) the names of the 10 sub-sample adolescent participants, one at a time, from note cards kept in a pocket. During four 30-minute periods in the afternoon and in the evening (in the mornings all youth were in individual activities), the observer located the selected adolescent and immediately formed a 5-second "snapshot". If the adolescent could not be located within five minutes (e.g., horseback riding, visiting parents), then another individual was selected. Recorded were the following:

(1) all group members within 12 feet of the target individual.

(2) the proximity of the target individual to all others within three distances:

(a) physical touching to arm's length

(b) arm's length to 4 feet

(c) 4 feet to 12 feet

(3) the global nature of the inteaction between the target individual and all other adolescents within the 12 foot radius, consisting of:

(a) verbal: actively engaged in a conversation

(b) physical: involved in physical interaction with another (e.g., playing ping pong, horseplay).

(c) passive/listening: no apparent or immediate interaction with other individuals (e.g., listening to music, reading)

Observations were made primarily during free time in the dormitory lounge, a large recreational area with ping pong tables, a stereo, chairs, board games, and kitchenette. Individuals moved freely between the lounge and their rooms or other restricted places.

While recording data was usually discrete and went unnoticed by adolescents, on occasions a participant would ask an observer what was being written. The response was a seemingly satisfactory, "Just noting group interactions". All participants were informed on Sunday evening of our interest in "how friendships formed and were maintained among youth". The agreed when they completed the first questionnaire to participate with the guarantee of anonymity and this final report of the study.

Results

Nominated Friends

On Sunday evening 29 adolescents (one had not yet arrived) listed their best friends. One individual listed eight friends while four (three of whom had never been to this camp) listed no one. The mean for the group was 1.8 names listed. Our sub-sample of 10

averaged 2.0 best friends (range=0 to 6). Twenty-two of the 29 adolescents selected each other as best friends ("mutual friends"). Two chose as best friends individuals who had selected them among their best five friends ("near-mutual friends"). One adolescent selected an individual who did not list him among his best friends ("discordant friends"). The other four adolescents, as noted previously, selected no one as best friend. Of the 13 mutual or near-mutual friendship pairs, 12 knew each other prior to camp.

By Friday evening, 27 adolescents (three left earlier in the day before the second questionnaire was given) nominated an oaverage of 5.6 group members as best friends. Our sub-sample averaged 5.0 names per respondent. No adolescent reported having no friends. Eight friendship pairs were mutual and another six adolescents selected near-mutual friends. Five chose discordant best friends. Nearly 50 percent (48 percent) of the best friend selections were of individuals they had known less than one week (i.e., had met at camp for the first time).

Twenty six of the 27 adolescents chose a member of the same-sex as his/her best friend and 22 of the 27 selections were with those within one year of age of the selector. Religious identity appeared to have little influence on the selection of friends as 70 percent of all best friends were of another religion (e.g., a Catholic and a Jew as best friends).

Table 1 summarizes what our adolescent participants "look for" in a friend and the activities that they enjoy doing with them. The youth most enjoyed "bopping around" with their "rowdy" friends. Playing sports was the second most desired activity; generosity, honesty, and coolness were also desirable adolescent traits.

---Table 1 about here---

Of the 11 Sunday mutual friendship pairs, five pairs remained mutual on Sunday. Three new mutual best friend dyads formed during the week and six broke up.

Observed Friendship

The subsample of 10 adolescents, five males and five females, were observed an average of 35.1 times during the week (range of 26 to 40). During these 351 observation snapshots, 547 interactions were noted (range of 33 to 66 per adolescent). Table 2 presents the relative frequency of the type and the relative distance of each interaction. Most interactions were with those beyond four feet away and were of a passive or listening nature.

---Table 2 about here---

Nine of the 10 adolescents interacted most frequently with the individual they selected as their best friend on Friday. The percentage of their total interactions (with the 29 other youth in the program) with this best friend averaged 24 percent (range 11 to 52 percent). The one exception became friends with his Friday evening selection during the last day of camp. The individual he interacted most with (14 percent) was his Sunday selected best friend.

We then compared the interactions our subsample of 10 had with their best friends (the one or two individuals with whom they interacted with most) with those they had with "non-friends" (all others in the group). There were significant differences between the two on type ($x^2=3.6$, p .10) of interaction. These differences, however, were only characteristics of the males ($x^2=8.7$, p .02; $x^2=5.8$, p .02) and not the females ($x^2=1.2$, NS; $x^2=.06$, NS) of the sample. In particular, the adolescent males were significantly more likely to interact physically ($t=2.91$, p .01) and to be in close contact ($t=2.23$, p .05) with their best friends.

Discussion

The study is primarily a descriptive one, confirming previous studies while offering a new methodology and raising several new issues. The self report data confirmed earlier findings that adolescents prefer as friends those of a similar sex and age. These friendships

were generally mutually shared. Our short-term longitudinal analysis revealed significant shifts in friendships over a one-week period of time, perhaps due to the short-term nature of the camp setting. Nearly one-half of all friendships shifted and discordant friendships were more prevalent by the end of camp. The number of friends increased dramatically during the week.

Our observational data agree with the self report data: individuals interacted most frequently with those they nominated as their best friends. This is the first such published report of the congruence between these two methods of assessing friendship. In addition, the observational data revealed a heretofore novel finding between the two sexes in adolescence: boys were more likely than girls to behaviorally distinguish best friends from other group members by interacting with same-sex peers at close range in a physical manner. This finding is similar to our previously collected data on adolescent social behavior during volleyball games (Savin-Williams, 1982; Spinola and Savin-Williams, in preparation) dominance interaction at a summer camp (Savin-Williams, 1979), and helping behavior during a coed bicycle trip (Zeldin, Small and Savin-Williams, 1982). In these studies boys were more frequently observed than were girls to (1) interact with teammates through physical encouragement (e.g., patting on the behind), (2) assert dominance over peers through physical means, and (3) help tripmates whenever there was a physical need (e.g., repairing a flat tire).

Although these studies also indicate that with age adolescent boys become less physical in their interactions, their level remains higher than for same age girls. This sex difference could be attributed to the socialization process of the way boys and girls are brought up differently in our society and to the ethological concept of male bonding, prevalent among most primate groups (Savin-Williams and Montemayor, in preparation). Although limited in scope (e.g., one group of adolescents), we believe this study sets an example of how friendship patterns among adolescents ought to be addressed.

Table 1: Characteristics and Activities Desired in Friends

Characteristics	Percent[1]
Rowdy: funny, outgoing, fun to be with, talkative	59%
Nice: generous, can talk to, understands	48%
Honest: sincere, loyal, open to ideas	28%
Cool: is together	28%
Other: don't know, likes same things	17%
Activities	
Bopping around: hanging out, messing around, having good time, going places	62%
Sports: tennis, bowling, biking, skiing	28%
Anything	24%
Talking	14%
Shopping	14%
Movies	10%

1 Percent of respondents who mention a characteristic or activity in each category; thus, total percents will exceed 100 percent.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of Each Type and Distance of Friendship Interactions

Type	Frequency	Percentage
Listening/Passive	301	55
Verbal	190	35
Physical	56	10
	547	100
Distance		
0-1½ feet	16	3
1½-4 feet	250	46
Over 4 feet	281	51
	547	100